UNITED NATIONS

Daily Highlights

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WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

* Secretary-General presents proposed programme budget for 1996-1997 to Administrative and Budgetary Committee; warns financial crisis threatens very viability of United Nations.

* UNPREDEP shows what timely deployment of peace-keepers with clear mandate can achieve, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia tells General Assembly.

* Secretary-General recommends Security Council maintain UNIKOM, citing Mission's contribution to calm on Iraq-Kuwait border.

* United Nations issues inter-agency appeal for $110 million for humanitarian assistance to Liberia through August 1996.

* High Commissioner for Human Rights tells Croatia prompt return of refugees in safety and dignity is matter of highest priority.

* United Nations reports alarming deterioration in humanitarian situation in Iraq over last six months.

* United Nations helps Rwanda construct three new detention centres, raising country's official prison capacity to 23,500.

* UNPROFOR protests after Bosnian Government forces fire heavy weapons in violation of Sarajevo exclusion zone.

* Economic and Financial Committee adopts programme of work and begins general debate on world economic situation.

* United States to host two-week intergovernmental conference on threats to global marine environment.

* DPI publishes blue book on United Nations involvement in human rights from 1945 to 1995.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali today presented his programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997 to the Fifth Committee (Administrative and Budgetary). He proposed a regular budget of $2.51 billion, before adjustments for such factors as inflation and currency fluctuations. The proposal was $109 million -- 4.2 per cent -- less than the revised 1994-1995 appropriation. After adjustments, the proposed budget would stand at $2.69 billion.

The Secretary-General said he had sought to achieve the maximum level of efficiency gains without a negative impact on the fulfilment of mandates. The proposed budget called for the abolition of 201 posts and the creation of 66 posts for new activities mandated by Member States. Special attention had been paid to strengthening the Organization's capacity with regard to political and peace-keeping activities, cooperation for development, support for human rights and humanitarian activities. Internal oversight capacity had also been increased. He emphasized his commitment to ensuring cost-effectiveness, enhancing administrative efficiency, strengthening accountability and eliminating waste.

Focusing on the current financial crisis, the Secretary-General noted that outstanding contributions to the regular budget amounted to almost $850 million, while those to peace-keeping amounted to $2.7 billion. The regular budget had run out of cash in August, and $123 million had been borrowed from peace-keeping to cover expenditures through September. He stressed that cost-saving measures could not substitute for full payment of assessed contributions by Member States, and warned that the very viability of the United Nations might now be at risk.

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The Foreign Minister of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Stevo Crvenkovski, told the General Assembly today that the attempted assassination of President Kiro Gligorov was an attack on his country's independent and peace-loving position. He stressed that the incident would not force the Republic to change course in the pursuit of democracy, reform and the development of good relations with all its neighbours. He urged the United Nations to continue its efforts against terrorism with strong determination.

Foreign Minister Crvenkovski said the accord signed recently by his country and Greece would contribute to stability in the Balkans. It illustrated the positive role of the United Nations in pursuing peaceful solutions in relations between States, based on the principles of the Charter. The United Nations Preventive Deployment (UNPREDEP) also contributed tremendously to peace and stability in the region, and showed what could be achieved by a small number of peace-keepers if deployed at the right time with a clear mandate.

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The Secretary-General has recommended that the Security Council maintain the United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission (UNIKOM). In a report dated 2 October, he said the Mission contributed significantly to the calm in its area of operation and enjoyed the effective cooperation of the Iraqi and Kuwaiti authorities.

Kuwait contributed two-thirds of the money needed to finance UNIKOM each month, and had paid its contributions for the period ending 31 October, he noted. However, unpaid assessments to the Special Account for the Mission amounted to more than $37 million.

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The United Nations today issued an inter-agency appeal for $110 million for assistance to Liberia through August 1996. The nine agencies involved in the appeal identified certain priority areas for action: food security; health; education; repatriation and reintegration of refugees and displaced people; aid to vulnerable groups; demobilization and reintegration of soldiers; and reconstruction of infrastructure.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said it needed $41 million for the protection and assistance of returnees and displaced persons. There are around 850,000 Liberian refugees in Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea and Sierra Leone. Inside Liberia, 1.3 million people, including large numbers of internally displaced persons, need humanitarian assistance.

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The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Jose Ayala Lasso, has written to Croatian President Franjo Tudjman saying that the prompt return in safety and dignity of all displaced persons, regardless of their national or ethnic origin, is a matter of the highest priority. He expressed deep concern that the wave of arson and looting of houses belonging to Serbs, in circumstances that pointed to the involvement of the Croatian security forces, was continuing.

Mr. Ayala Lasso also expressed concern regarding the discriminatory character of a recent law which effectively gave Croatia control over property "abandoned" by Krajina Serb refugees. The Croatian Government had failed to fulfil its solemn commitment to create conditions conducive to the return of Krajina Serb refugees and thus to guarantee their human and minority rights, he concluded.

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There has been an alarming deterioration in the humanitarian situation in Iraq during the last six months, according to a mid-term report on the United Nations inter-agency humanitarian programme for the country. Conditions are especially bad in the areas of health, nutrition, water and sanitation, and the World Food Programme (WFP) is doubling its caseload to 2.1 million people.

Despite the increased need for assistance, contributions to the humanitarian programme have fallen. Only $33 million has been pledged or received since 1 April, against estimated priority needs of $183 million.

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The Special Representative for Rwanda, Shahryar Khan, will tomorrow open three new detention centres built to alleviate overcrowding in the country's prisons. Rwanda currently has 52,000 prisoners, but an official prison capacity of only 12,500. The new centres will almost double that capacity to 23,500.

Construction of the detention centres was coordinated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) provided logistical support.

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The Force Commander of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), Lieutenant-General Rupert Smith, met yesterday with the Foreign Minister of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Muhamed Sacirbey, to protest a blatant violation of the Sarajevo exclusion zone by Bosnian Government forces. About 100 rounds were fired from heavy weapons inside the zone, apparently in support of an infantry action against Serb positions to the south of the city, near the town of Trnovo. The Foreign Minister indicated that he would look into the matter.

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The Second Committee (Economic and Financial) yesterday adopted its programme of work and elected Max Stadhagen (Nicaragua) and Conor Murphy (Ireland) as its Vice-Chairmen. The Committee Chairman, Goce Petreski (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), was elected by the General Assembly on 19 September.

As the Committee began its general debate on the world economic situation, the representative of the Philippines said no amount of institutional reform could strengthen the United Nations role in development

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unless accompanied by sufficient resources. Speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 developing countries and China, he stressed that reforms must be determined by policy objectives and not the other way around.

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The United States is to host a two-week intergovernmental conference on threats to the global marine environment and the well-being of the 3.5 billion people that live in the world's coastal areas. The conference, which will begin in Washington, D.C., on 23 October, is expected to adopt a global programme of action to meet those threats.

Almost 80 per cent of marine pollution and other types of marine degradation is caused by land-based activities, according to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The draft programme of action deals with such problems as waste-water treatment and management, persistent organic pollutants and physical destruction of habitats of marine living resources.

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The Department of Public Information (DPI) has published "The United Nations and Human Rights, 1945-1995", the seventh volume of the blue books series. The book tells the full story of the Organization's efforts to create a culture of human rights worldwide, building on the principles of the Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It includes a comprehensive collection of historic United Nations documents.

"The fight for human rights remains, more than ever before, a top priority for the international community," said the Secretary-General in his introduction to the book. "The United Nations must continue to mobilize its efforts, so that human rights may one day emerge at last as the common language of humanity."

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UNITED NATIONS

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THURSDAY HIGHLIGHTS

* Pope John Paul II, in address to General Assembly, calls for common effort to build civilization of love based on values of peace, solidarity, justice and liberty.

* Secretary-General says spirituality provides common bond among nations; United Nations was created so compassion could conquer despair of poverty, disease and injustice.

* Bosnian parties agree to cease-fire with effect from Tuesday; United States-brokered agreement requires restoration of Sarajevo utilities and reopening of roads to Gorazde.

* UNPROFOR troop strength to be reduced by 9,000 as military situation stabilizes and political process gains momentum in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

* United Nations expresses concern about financial situation of International Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia; says only 11 Member States have paid assessed contributions for 1995.

* Expanded draft on land-mines circulates at Review Conference of States Parties to Conventional Weapons Convention.

* Special Political and Decolonization Committee approves programme of work for session and elects Vice-Chairmen.

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Addressing the General Assembly on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, Pope John Paul II today called for a common effort to build a civilization of love based on the universal values of peace, solidarity, justice and liberty. He said that in order to ensure that the new millennium witnessed a new flourishing of the human spirit, mediated through an authentic culture of freedom, men and women must learn to conquer fear. He stressed that fear of the future could only be overcome through a collective effort.

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Fifty years after its founding, the need for the United Nations was even more obvious, the Pope said. The Organization needed to rise above the status of an administrative institution and become a moral centre where nations felt at home and developed a shared awareness of being one family. The United Nations had the historic task not only of serving as a centre of mediation for conflict resolution, but also of fostering values and initiatives of solidarity which could raise the level of relations between nations from simple existence with others to existence for others.

Unhappily, the world had yet to learn how to live with diversity, the Pope said, citing recent events in the Balkans and central Africa. Amplified by historic grievances and the manipulations of the unscrupulous, the fear of "difference" could lead to a denial of the humanity of "the other" with the result that people fell into a cycle of violence. He emphasized that different cultures were but different ways of facing the question of the meaning of existence. "And it is precisely here that we find one source of the respect which is due to every culture and every nation: every culture is an effort to ponder the mystery of the world and in particular of the human person: it is a way of giving expression to the transcendent dimension of human life."

The global economy needed an ethic of solidarity, if participation, growth and a just distribution of goods were to characterize the future of humanity, he went on to say. "When millions of people are suffering from a poverty which means hunger, malnutrition, sickness, illiteracy and degradation, we must not only remind ourselves that no one has a right to exploit another for his own advantage, but also and above all we must recommit ourselves to that solidarity which enables others to live out, in the actual circumstances of their economic and political lives, the creativity which is a distinguishing mark of the human person and the true source of the wealth of nations in today's world."

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Introducing Pope John Paul II to the General Assembly, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said that spirituality was humanity's greatest gift, and that belief in a higher reality provided a common bond among nations. However, a crisis of the human spirit was taking place and it must be made possible for peoples to regain their faith. He stressed that the United Nations was essential for humanity to rebuild its spiritual foundations.

The Holy Father's presence was a reminder of the spiritual dimension of the United Nations, the Secretary-General continued. The Organization had been created so that hope could conquer the horror of war. It had been created so that compassion -- the compassion shared by all religions -- could conquer the despair of poverty, disease and injustice.

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"Hope enables us to continue our mission, under the most adverse conditions," he concluded. "Faith enables us to continue the dialogue, to pursue negotiation, even when a situation seems desperate. Love enables us to continue development, to reach out to the less fortunate of our fellow human beings."

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The warring parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina today signed a cease-fire agreement covering the whole country, according to United Nations radio in Zagreb. The cease-fire will take effect on Tuesday, October 10, provided gas and electricity supplies have been restored to Sarajevo by then. It will last for 60 days, or until completion of peace talks aimed at a full peace settlement. The agreement requires the reopening of roads into Gorazde, the last enclave in eastern Bosnia.

The agreement brokered by the United States was signed after an intense round of "telephone shuttle diplomacy" between negotiators in Sarajevo and Belgrade, United States envoy Richard Holbrooke was reported as saying. He added that full implementation of the cease-fire would be critical.

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The United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) is to be reconfigured in response to dramatic changes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, including the stabilization of the military situation and developments in the political process, a spokesman for the Organization announced today. On the recommendation of the Force Commander, and with the approval of the Secretary-General, troop strength will be reduced from 30,500 to 21,000, while the overall structure of the Force will be streamlined. Redeployments are expected to begin later this month.

UNPROFOR units from Bangladesh, Canada, the Netherlands, Pakistan and the United Kingdom will be repatriated, for a reduction of over 4,000 troops, the spokesman continued. At the same time, units from Malaysia, the Nordic countries, Pakistan, Spain and Turkey will be cut by to up to 500 troops to conform to United Nations specifications for a generic battalion strength. That will result in a further reduction of over 2,000.

About 3,000 members of the United Kingdom's 24th Air Mobile Brigade, deployed as part of the Rapid Reaction Force (RRF), will be relocated to the United Kingdom. They will remain on standby to redeploy within seven days if required, bringing the total number of troops on standby to 8,000.

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A United Nations spokesman today expressed concern about the financial situation of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. He noted that since the July decision to fund the Tribunal by assessed contributions, only $1.16 million of the $20.16 million needed for 1995 had been received. Only 11 Member States had paid any of their assessments. If States were genuinely concerned about the work of the Tribunal, they should provide the necessary funds, he concluded.

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An expanded draft of the Protocol on anti-personnel land-mines has been circulated at the Vienna Review Conference of States Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. The Protocol is being redrafted to strengthen the Convention's restrictions on the production and use of land-mines.

The new draft, which emerged from consultations in a working group, is three times longer and far more specific than the original. It specifies the circumstances in which the Protocol would be applied and the implications of its application. The working group agreed that, in cases of internal armed conflicts on a State party's territory, dissident armed groups in that territory would be bound by the Protocol. It did not decide, however, whether the Protocol should apply only to armed conflicts covered by the 1949 Geneva Conventions.

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The Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) yesterday approved its programme of work for the current session and elected Niall Holohan (Ireland) and Jalal Samadi (Iran) as its two Vice-Chairmen. It also established an open-ended working group on the peaceful uses of outer space.

In his opening address, Chairman Francis Muthaura (Kenya) said the Committee had an important task in improving the peace-keeping role of the United Nations. Peace-keeping was a major instrument for international peace and security, as well as a support for humanitarian activities. Ironically, the Organization did many good things but tended to be identified by its few shortcomings.

The signing of the Interim Agreement extending Palestinian administrative authority over the West Bank had reinforced the momentum for peace in the Middle East, the Chairman told the Committee. However, the preparation for the referendum in Western Sahara had been slower than anticipated and must be speeded up.

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F R I D A Y H I G H L I G H T S

* Security Council welcomes Bosnian cease-fire agreement; urges parties to comply fully with all provisions once they come into effect.

* Secretary-General expresses serious concern after incident in Guatemala leaves 10 dead and 18 wounded; says those responsible must be brought to justice.

* United Nations and Organization of Islamic Conference hold high-level talks on mutual cooperation and coordination.

* South Africa expresses gratitude for United Nations role in overcoming apartheid; stresses links between good governance, economic growth and sustainable development.

* Iraq says it has complied with Security Council resolutions and sanctions should be lifted; United States replies Iraqi assertions have no credibility.

* Secretary-General appoints Liviu Bota as Resident Deputy to Special Envoy for Georgia and Head of UNOMIG.

* Member States owe United Nations $3.33 billion as of 30 September; $810 million owed to regular budget and $2.52 billion owed to peace-keeping and International Tribunals.

* * *

The Security Council today welcomed the agreement by the Bosnian parties to a cease-fire requiring the termination of all hostile military activities as of 10 October, provided that utility services are restored to Sarajevo. In a statement by its President, Ibrahim Gambari (Nigeria), the Council called on the parties to cooperate with efforts to restore such services. It urged the parties to comply fully with all provisions of the agreement once they came into effect.

The Council also welcomed the decision of the Governments of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) to attend proximity peace talks by the end of the month, to be

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followed by a peace conference. It reiterated that there could be no military solution to the Bosnian conflict and urged the parties to negotiate in good faith on the basis of the Geneva Declarations of Principles of 8 September and the Further Agreed Principles of 26 September.

In addition, the Council welcomed the 3 October agreement by the Croatian Government and the local Serb authorities in eastern Croatia on guiding basic principles for negotiations. It strongly urged both parties to negotiate in good faith towards a peaceful settlement of the conflict consistent with Council resolutions.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has expressed serious concern about an incident that occurred yesterday in a returnee community in the Alta Verapaz region of Guatemala. According to preliminary reports, 10 people were killed and 18 wounded in the incident. The Secretary-General said that those responsible for it should be promptly identified and brought to justice.

The United Nations Mission for the Verification of Human Rights in Guatemala (MINUGUA) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) are jointly verifying the facts and will report on it as soon as possible. Meanwhile, the President of Guatemala has gone to the region, accompanied by a senior MINUGUA official.

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Senior officials of the United Nations and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) met yesterday at Headquarters in a follow-up to the meeting between the Secretaries-General of the two Organizations on Tuesday. They discussed issues of mutual interest to the United Nations and the OIC and ways of strengthening cooperation and coordination in the political field.

Both sides expressed satisfaction with the excellent level of cooperation between the two Organizations and agreed to hold regular consultations on issues of mutual interest.

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The Foreign Minister of South Africa, Alfred Nzo, today expressed gratitude for the courage and perseverance of the United Nations in assisting his country's struggle for democracy. He told the General Assembly that South Africa was firmly committed to: promoting national welfare, prosperity and security; strengthening cooperation in the pursuit of economic development and security in Southern Africa; peace, stability and good governance in Africa and elsewhere; South-South cooperation; and responsible international citizenship. The greatest need today was to eradicate the scourge of poverty afflicting the great mass of Africa's people.

Years of apartheid had left South Africa's majority black population with a legacy of poverty, social disintegration and political fragmentation, the Foreign Minister said. The Government's priority task was to devise a national strategy to address that situation. Good governance, economic growth and sustainable development were interdependent, he stressed. South Africa was taking a great interest in work on the Agenda for Development. The Agenda opened great possibilities for partnership between the developed and developing countries.

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Yesterday, the Foreign Minister of Iraq, Mohammed Said Al-Sahaf, told the Assembly that a "uni-polar view" had been imposed on the United Nations that contradicted the principles of the Charter. That was confirmed by Iraq's experience with Security Council resolutions for more than five years. Iraq had attempted to comply with those resolutions and hoped that a fair evaluation by the Council would lead to the lifting of sanctions.

The prolongation of sanctions was not tied to Iraq's performance, the Foreign Minister continued. It reflected a systematic plan to damage and destroy its infrastructure and developmental capabilities. It was the United States that must prove its credibility, and halt its provocations, aggression and interference in Iraq's internal affairs. It must understand that solutions lay in dialogue, and that a policy of "hegemony and crisis" could only fail.

Exercising the right of reply, United States Permanent Representative Madeleine Albright said she was stunned to hear the Iraqi Minister speak of credibility. After four years of deception, Iraq's current assertions regarding its compliance with Council resolutions had "zero credibility". Actions, not words, would make the international community treat Iraq differently, she added.

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The Secretary-General has appointed Liviu Bota as Resident Deputy to the Special Envoy for Georgia, Edouard Brunner, and Head of the United Nations Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) with effect from 1 October. Mr. Bota will coordinate United Nations political, peace-keeping and humanitarian activities in the area aimed at achieving a comprehensive settlement of the Georgian/Abkhaz conflict.

Mr. Bota will maintain direct contacts with high-level officials on the Georgian and Abkhaz sides on behalf of the Special Envoy, and consult regularly with representatives of the Russian Federation in its role as facilitator to the peace process. He will provide guidance to the Chief Military Observer of UNOMIG, who remains responsible for the Mission's day-to-day activities.

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Member States owed the United Nations a total of $3.33 billion as of 30 September, down from $3.8 billion as of 31 August, according to the latest update on the Organization's financial situation. Some $810 million was owed to the regular budget and $2.52 billion was owed for peace-keeping operations and the International Tribunals.

The United States -- the largest debtor -- owed $527 million to the regular budget and $907 million to peace-keeping. The Russian Federation owed $21 million to the regular budget and $571 million to peace-keeping.

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UNITED NATIONS

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MONDAY HIGHLIGHTS

* Secretary-General, addressing Finance Ministers in World Bank/IMF Development Committee, stresses need for full and prompt payment of United Nations assessed contributions.

* UNPROFOR condemns Bosnian Serb attacks on refugee camps near Tuzla; calls for NATO close air support after peace-keepers are directly targeted.

* Secretary-General says meetings between Angolan Government and UNITA have generated confidence in peace process; voices concern at slow progress in quartering troops.

* United Nations launches inter-agency appeal for $124 million to fund humanitarian activities in Afghanistan for one year.

* Secretary-General meets with Foreign Minister of Iraq; urges implementation of Security Council resolution 986 (1995).

* Delegates to Conventional Weapons Review Conference agree on text restricting use and transfer of blinding laser weapons.

* Governing Council of United Nations Compensation Commission begins eighteenth session in Geneva.

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The United Nations is facing its worst financial crisis in 50 years and its ability to continue its work is under threat, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said today. In an address to Ministers of Finance meeting in the World Bank/International Monetary Fund (IMF) Development Committee in Washington, D.C., he noted that the Organization was owed a total of $3.242 billion and that some 70 countries had not paid their regular budget assessment.

The crisis had arisen not because spending had gone over budget, but because contributions to finance mandated activities had not been paid, the Secretary-General continued. He pointed out that the United Nations was not allowed to borrow against unpaid contributions or charge interest for delayed payment. To deal with the crisis, the Organization had cut expenses,

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streamlined operations and reduced waste, duplication and overlap. It was managing by trimming budgets and by postponing payments to troop contributors and suppliers, but that made it difficult to fulfil mandates adequately.

The Secretary-General went on to say that he had been forced to reassess peace-keeping operations from a financial perspective, with the result that the crisis was being felt on the front lines. If action was not taken quickly, human suffering would increase and people would die. He urged the Ministers to ensure that their countries' financial obligations to the Organization were met on time and in full.

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Bosnian Serb forces attacked refugee camps near Tuzla over the weekend, killing at least ten civilians and injuring many more, a United Nations spokesman reported today. The United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) condemned the attacks, describing them as outrageous and barbaric. The Serbs also directly targeted United Nations personnel stationed at Tuzla airbase, causing the death of one peace-keeper. As a result, the Force Commander of UNPROFOR, Lieutenant-General Rupert Smith, called for North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) close air support.

Meanwhile, efforts were being made to restore utility supplies to Sarajevo so that the cease-fire agreed to by the Bosnian parties could take effect after midnight. Electricity lines from the east and south of the city had been repaired by this morning, and work was under way on the main line from the west. Sarajevo's water pumps were also being repaired.

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The recent meetings between the President of Angola, Jose Eduardo dos Santos, and the leader of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), Jonas Savimbi, have generated greater trust and confidence in the Angolan peace process, according to the Secretary-General. However, in a report to the Security Council dated 4 October, he expressed concern at the slow progress in the process of quartering troops, which was essential for full implementation of the Lusaka Protocol.

The report called on the Government and UNITA to promptly finalize arrangements for the return of the Angolan Armed Forces (FAA) to barracks, the quartering of the rapid reaction police and the disarmament of civilians. It also urged them to quickly conclude their discussions on the formation of the new armed forces. Unless an equitable and practicable agreement was reached in the near future, that issue could jeopardize the peace process as a whole.

The Secretary-General welcomed the results of the Brussels Round-Table Conference, at which donors pledged a total of $993 million for Angola. However, he also noted that outstanding assessed contributions to the Special

Account for the United Nations Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM III) amounted to $117 million.

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The United Nations today launched an inter-agency appeal for $124 million to fund humanitarian activities in Afghanistan for a one-year period through September 1996. More than 1.7 million Afghans receive United Nations humanitarian assistance.

Under-Secretary-General Peter Hansen has been in Afghanistan recently in his capacity as United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator. He will leave Geneva on Wednesday for a one-week visit to Sierra Leone to assess the humanitarian situation there.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali met with the Foreign Minister of Iraq, Mohammed Said Al-Sahaf, on Friday, according to a United Nations spokesman. They discussed the implementation of Security Council resolution 986 (1995), which allowed for a partial lifting of sanctions against Iraq to enable it to sell oil and use the proceeds for humanitarian purchases.

The Secretary-General urged the Iraqi Government to rethink its position on resolution 986 (1995) and to implement it. However, the Foreign Minister stated that his Government's position with regard to the resolution remained unchanged.

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Delegates attending the Review Conference of the 1980 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons have agreed on a text restricting the use and transfer of blinding laser weapons. The text, which represents a delicate balance among a spectrum of views on the details and extent of a ban on such weapons, is subject to approval by the States Parties to the Convention before the Conference ends on 13 October.

The breakthrough was achieved after a series of closed meetings and intensive consultations. Some delegations advocated a total ban on all laser weapons which might cause long-term vision loss, while others cautioned against over-restriction of the development of laser technology for military use.

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The Governing Council of the United Nations Compensation Commission today began its eighteenth session in Geneva. During the three-day session, it will consider some 217,000 additional claims for compensation resulting from departures from Iraq and Kuwait during the Gulf War. Those claims from 67 countries amount to some $770 million. The Council will also discuss the status of the compensation fund.

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